

## **Death and Disease**

More sailors died from disease than any other cause whilst at sea. It is surprising that the figures are no higher given the appalling conditions onboard the naval ships.

<b>Cause of Death</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Disease.....	50%
Individual Accident.....	31.5%
Fire or Explosion.....	10.2%
Enemy (killed in action).....	5.4%
Enemy (died from wounds).....	2.9%

The cramped and damp conditions on the ship made it an excellent breeding ground for disease.

### **Tropical disease:**

Malaria and yellow fever are both deadly diseases carried by mosquitoes. They could strike down ships' crews visiting tropical climates.

Horatio Nelson almost died when he caught malaria on a visit to India!

### **Surgery:**

There were very few medicines available in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Until 1804 surgeons were expected to provide their own drugs and equipment. Complicated surgical procedures on abdominal wounds were impossible, even on shore. These sorts of wounds were often fatal.

### **Amputation:**

In the middle of a battle, the surgeon's assistant (who was often more skilled than the surgeon!) would be called onboard to attend to casualties. They could easily fill a barrel with severed limbs. If splinters or cannon balls had smashed sailors' limbs the only treatment considered was amputation. The common practice when treating amputations was to tie off the arteries and veins and leave them hanging free from the wound and removed later when the wound had healed. Unfortunately this meant that many men died from wounds that were open to infection.